Brooker Notes

Most often in curriculum-making practices in Western schools

student voices have generally beenmarginalized. At best, learners’ opinions

are sought only after signi® cant decisions (e.g. the selection of legitimate

content) have already been made and the curriculum has been determined

by o. cially approved persons (Aronowitz and Giroux 1993).

Although students are considered central to

schooling, they are rarely consulted in curriculummaking (Dyson 1995). If

Although these stakeholders believe they are acting in the best interests

of learners, one can rightly ask `whose interests are being served and whose

interests are excluded’ (Cherryholmes 1987: 311). While the curriculum

supposedly exists to serve the interests of learners, their preferences, if

sought at all, are marginalized and their voices are mostly silent in curriculum

making. This marginalization of student voice is of particular

concern in such subjects as physical education[PE] in which the essence of

the subject is closely linked to the interests and culture of learners.

But what does legitimate student `voice’ sound like? Britzman (1989:

146) suggests that the concept of voice has several meanings, including the

literal (representing speech and the perspectives of the speaker), metaphorical

(the manner and qualities of the speaker’s words), and political (a

commitment to the right to speak and be represented). Within the political

On the basis of hindsight, therefore, we raise issues about how student

voice was positioned during the project, and o. er suggestions for enabling

students in the future to contribute in a more meaningful way to curriculum

making

At the systemic, school and subject level, the curriculum has tended to be

something `planned for’ and `done to’ students (Klein 1989: 90). Erickson

and Schultz (1992: 481) claim that the `systematic silencing of the student

voice’ is consistent with traditional authority structures in schools and a

consequence of methodological preferences for positivistic research techniques

in formulating and implementing such procedures as those followed

in this case. Their criticism can be understood by examining how di. erent

Cumming (1994: 42) recommends `authentic student participation’

which `means nothing less than all young adolescents assuming a

proactive role in the planning, implementing and evaluating of their own

learning’.

Edwards (1994:

52) not only supports an approach to education that focuses on students’

concerns in all phases of design and implementation, but also recommends

that the curriculum be negotiated with and be relevant to students,

structured around primary concepts, assessed in line with students’ learning,

and adapted tostudents’ progress.

. Smith (1989:

34) is concerned that the mere fact of listening to student voice often

remains an end in itself ± `a celebration after which we return to the

everyday’

In other words, educators need a theory of curriculum that alerts them to

howschooling renders some students voiceless, howteachers are reduced to

technicians, and how particular forms of authority subvert the ethical force

of educational leadership and learning.

With respect to student voice, they suggest that `it is on the

terrains of a class and popular culture that students primarily develop an

active voice’ (Aronowitz and Giroux 1993: 128).

In addition, Morrison (1996: 5) advocates a co-operative and collaborative

approach in which teachers `work on the experiences that children bring to

school, interrogate themcritically, . . . so that children’s life experiences are

transformed into critical awareness and empowerment’.

a study of student voice

needs to take account of those new (learning) technologies changing the

means of knowledge production and distribution (Hinkson 1992, Evans and

Davies 1993, Rovengo and Kirk 1995). Children possessing skills derived

from their interactions with technology and media, White (1994: 87)

contends, have a `new orientation to the world’ in which new relations

are possible. As a consequence of new electronic communication, White

claims, schools should reduce their reliance on print and rethink their

conceptions of teacher authority.

but also adopt teaching approaches that heighten

students’ critical capacities and foreground `individual sensitivity . . . which

is supportive, nurturing and accepting’ (Tinning 1994: 84).

Because data were collected from several sources and from each

school, we were able to triangulate our ® ndings to establish trustworthiness.

A post-evaluation re-examination of the

data collected from students in the course of the evaluation, made it clear

that the student voice could have informed the development of the subject

in ways that other stakeholders could not.

Their comments aboutwhocould achieve success in PE remind curriculum

makers of the importance of developing a school subject that provides

opportunities and learning experiences for students with a wide range of

abilities:

There is a lot of guys [sic] who are good in this particular area so for them to

do well at the subject it’s important. They might not be as academically

smart as others but they can dowell in this area. Sofor themit’s an important

subject.

The practical side is good . . . it gives everyone a fair chance.

As a

issues of student voice in curriculum innovation 93

Downloaded by [University of Cincinnati Libraries] at 19:30 17 April 2012

result, student voices were `homogenized’ because they were reported as a

single entity, free of any socio-historical and contextual recognition (Ellsworth

1992, Orner 1992).

The challenge is to embrace curriculum-making

practices that are more inclusive and valuing of student voice. Such a

shift to position curriculum making in a contested (concerned about the

`why’) rather than positivistic (concerned about the `how’) framework,

requires policies and practices underpinned by commitments tothe right of

students to speak and be represented, and to a faithful representation of

their speech and perspectives (Britzman 1989).

At yet another level, the practices designed to `hear’ and report student

voice need rethinking. To position their voices meaningfully in curriculum

making, individual students could act as volunteer `cases’ whose experiences

of a new curriculum could be tracked throughout the period of the

evaluation. The perspectives of these students, together with relevant

elements of their biographies, could be included in the evaluation reports

as individual case studies. By so doing, the diversity of student reaction toa

The inclusion of students `might serve to

enable them to overcome the institutional barriers that operate against an

emancipatory view of students as active curriculummakers’ (Mac anGhaill

1992: 231).

Look up

GRAHAM, G. (1995a) Physical education through students’ eyes and in students’ voices:

introduction. Journal of Teaching in Physical Education, 14 (4), 364± 371.

VEAL, M. L. and COMPAGNONE, N. (1995) How sixth graders perceive e. ort and skill.

Journal of Teaching in Physical Education, 14 (4), 431± 444.

ORNER, M. (1992) Interrupting the calls for student voice in `liberatory’ education: a

feminist poststructuralist perspective. In C. Luke and J. Gore (eds), Feminisms and

Critical Pedagogy (New York: Routledge), 74± 89.

ELLSWORTH, E. (1992) Why doesn’t this feel empowering? working through the repressive

myths of critical pedagogy. In C. Luke and J. Gore (eds), Feminisms and Critical

Pedagogy (New York: Routledge), 90± 119.

DYSON, B. P. (1995) Students’ voices in two alternative elementary physical education

programs. Journal of Teaching in Physical Education, 14 (4), 394± 407.

BRITZMAN, D. P. (1989) Who has the ¯ oor? curriculum, teaching, and the English student

teacher’s struggle for voice. Curriculum Inquiry, 19 (2), 143± 162.